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ABSTRACT

Ontario students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) face serious challenges and inequities. Students are ineligible for ESL support after having been in Canada for 3 years, regardless of their ability to communicate (although the government's own ESL curriculum states that students may require from 5-7 years to acquire sufficient English fluency to cope with academic requirements). ESL only serves foreign-born students and is unavailable to students born in Canada who cannot speak English. Because of the Grade 10 Literacy Test, ESL secondary students are disadvantaged in their ability to acquire a secondary school diploma. EQAO testing results show that the achievement gap between ESL students and non-ESL students is increasing. Even though immigration in Ontario increased 23 percent in 1 year, the number of ESL teachers and programs in schools has declined significantly. In recent years, access to ESL programs has declined to the point where for the most part, only the neediest students are served. Recommendations include the following: the provincial government change the criteria that qualify students for ESL funding; the funding formula be modified to provide resources for boards to accommodate students arriving in Canada throughout the school year; class sizes be reduced; and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test be significantly modified to address language challenges of ESL students. (SM)

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ED 481 304

English as a Second Language in Ontario Schools

A People for Education Report

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People for Education is a group of parents working together in support of fully publicly-funded education in Ontario.

English as a Second Language in Ontario Schools

Summary

Ontario students learning English as a Second Language face serious challenges and inequities. Failure to address this problem perpetuates a discriminatory restriction on the prospects for these students' academic and career choices.

- Students are ineligible for ESL support after they have been in Canada for three years, regardless of their ability to comprehend English. However, the government's own ESL curriculum states that "students may require *from five to seven years*" to acquire sufficient fluency in English to cope with academic requirements.
- Because of the Grade 10 Literacy Test, ESL secondary school students are unfairly disadvantaged in their ability to acquire a secondary school diploma.
- EQAO testing results show that the achievement gap between ESL students and non-ESL students is increasing.
- Even though immigration to Ontario increased 23% in one year, the number of ESL teachers and programs in schools has declined significantly.

Programs and teachers decline as student numbers rise

People for Education tracking research shows that the number of schools reporting ESL programs and teachers dropped significantly this year, even though there was no decrease in the number of ESL students.

- The number of elementary schools reporting ESL programs has dropped 31% since 1997/98.
- The number of elementary schools reporting ESL teachers has dropped 29% since 1998/99.

Over the last five years, access to English as a Second Language programs has declined to the point where, for the most part, only the neediest students (Levels 1 and 2) are served , while those who are not fluent but have some facility in English (Levels 3 and 4) are less likely to receive formal support.

Immigration and language

While the numbers of ESL teachers and programs are declining annually, immigration to Ontario is increasing. Statistics Canada in its 2001 census findings reports that:

> Ontario attracted 149,900 immigrants in 2000/01, about 33,100 more than in 1999/2000. Although Ontario's population accounted for less than 40% of the population of the country, almost 60% of all immigrants arriving in Canada settled there.[1]

As well, Statistics Canada's 1996 Population/Language Profile shows that, of Ontario's 10,642,790 residents, 22% have a first language other than English or French,[2] and 13% speak a language other than English or French at home.

The Education Quality Assessment Office (EQAO) has gathered demographic information which also shows a disparity in the number of students receiving ESL support and those whose home language is other than English. In 2000, 21% of Grade 3 students, spoke "only, as often or mostly a language other than English at home". At the same time, only 4% of Grade 3 students were receiving ESL support in schools.[3]

Many ESL students fail to qualify for ESL funding

"ESL only serves foreign born students; we have a number of students born in Quebec who speak Spanish as a first language and French as their second language. No ESL service."

JK-8 school, Limestone District School Board

School boards receive funding for English as a Second Language programs based on the number of students in a board who fit the provincial criteria for ESL. The funding is limited to students who have been in Canada for three years or less, and who have come to Canada from a country in which the first language is not English. These criteria exclude students:

- who enter Canada from an English-speaking country but cannot speak English,
- who are born in Canada but cannot speak English, or
- who take longer than three years to learn the language.

There are a number of flaws in the funding formula for ESL.

Funding for ESL is contained in the General Legislative Grants and is given at the beginning of each year. There is no funding for ESL students who arrive after the beginning of the school year.

Children born in Canada but unable to speak English have parents who are recent immigrants, or who are members of Native or established ethnic communities (such as Mennonites). Their need to learn English is equal to that of non-English-speaking children who have recently immigrated.

"...students may require* from five to seven years *to develop the ability to understand the academic language used in textbooks and to use English to express the increasingly complex and abstract concepts encountered in the higher grades."

The Ontario Curriculum. Grades 1-8: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development

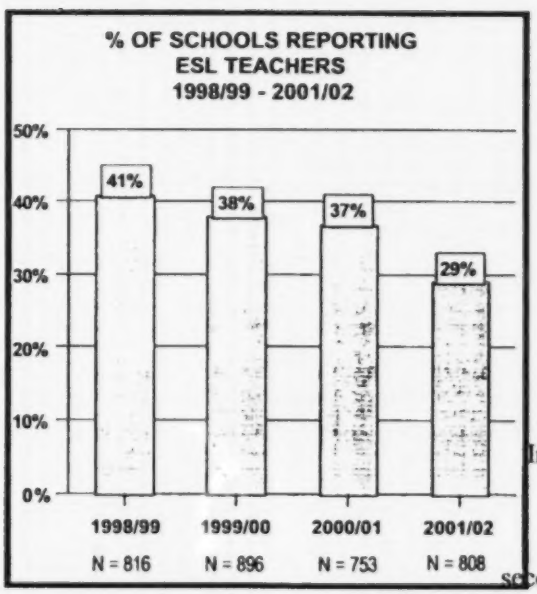
Research regarding the acquisition of a second language shows that it takes between five and ten years to achieve complete proficiency.[4] The government's own ESL curriculum states: "[ESL/ELD] students need to be given time to develop their skills in English before their achievement can be assessed according to the criteria used for other students."[5] The curriculum goes on to note: "Most ESL/ELD students are able to use English to communicate in social situations and day-to-day classroom interactions within one or two years. However, students may require *from five to seven years* [original emphasis] to develop the ability to understand the academic language used in textbooks and to use English to express the increasingly complex and abstract concepts encountered in the higher grades." [6]

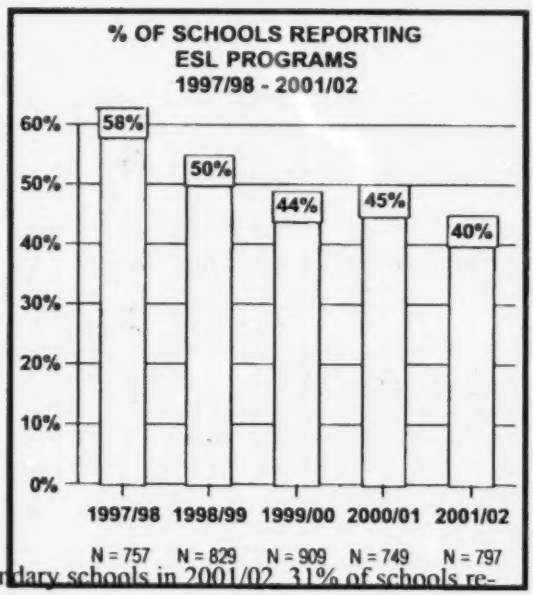
Despite this statement, students are ineligible for ESL support after three years in Canada, whether they are competently fluent or not. This restricts their opportunities for success, both within the school system and in their career options. The loss of ESL support after three years frequently results in students being inappropriately placed in special education programs. This adds to the strain on special education services and fails to address the needs of the ESL students. As an Elementary Teachers' document on students with special needs notes, "We wouldn't need expensive remediation in later grades if monies were provided early in school to support language learning for these students."[9]

People for Education's tracking research shows a continuing decline in ESL resources.
In our 2001/02 survey of elementary schools:

Cuts to ESL programs and teachers

- 46% of schools reported ESL students, down from 48% in 2000/01,
- 40% of schools reported ESL programs, down from 58% in 1997/98, and
- 29% of schools reported ESL teachers, down from 41% in 1998/99.





In secondary schools in 2001/02, 31% of schools reported that they had ESL programs, compared to 35% in 2000/01.

In the 11% of elementary schools reporting ESL programs but no teachers, ESL is delivered by other teaching staff.

ESL programs and students are not evenly distributed around the province. In our 2001/02 survey:

- 71% of the ESL students are in schools in the 416 and 905 area codes (Toronto and surrounding areas),

"Last year a teacher was assigned to teach the ESL program. This year an educational assistant delivers it."

JK-6 school
Trillium Lakelands
District School Board

- 62% of schools in the 416 and 905 area codes reported having ESL programs, down from 77% in 1997/98, and
- 26% of schools in other parts of the province reported having ESL programs.

In our 2001/02 survey, in elementary schools reporting ESL students:

- 50% of schools reported 11 students or fewer, and
- 10% of schools reported more than 100 students.

Some schools noted a large increase in ESL students. A number of schools said they had more students and fewer teachers, and a number of schools expressed concern that ESL students were being taught by special education teachers, librarians and, in one case, the physical education teacher, none of whom had any ESL training.

Testing results show disparity for ESL

Testing of Ontario students over the past four years reveals that ESL students are falling farther behind non-ESL students. While non-ESL student performance has generally improved every year over the testing period, the performance of ESL students is generally declining. People for Education tracking research shows that the numbers of programs and teachers for ESL students are decreasing. Over the same time, the performance of ESL students compared to non-ESL students on Grades 3 and 6 Reading and

Percentage of Students Meeting the Government Standard in Grade 3 Tests

	Reading		Writing	
	Non-ESL	ESL	Non-ESL	ESL
1997-98	47%	23%	50%	29%
1998-99	45%	21%	52%	34%
1999-00	50%	21%	53%	24%
2000-01	50%	21%	53%	26%
% change	+3%	-2%	+3%	-3%

EQAO Ontario Provincial Reports on Achievement

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Writing tests has deteriorated.

Percentage of Students Meeting the Government Standard in Grade 6 Tests				
	Reading		Writing	
	Non-ESL	ESL	Non-ESL	ESL
1998-99	49%	17%	49%	22%
1999-00	51%	17%	49%	15%
2000-01	56%	22%	54%	21%
% change	+7%	+5%	+5%	-1%

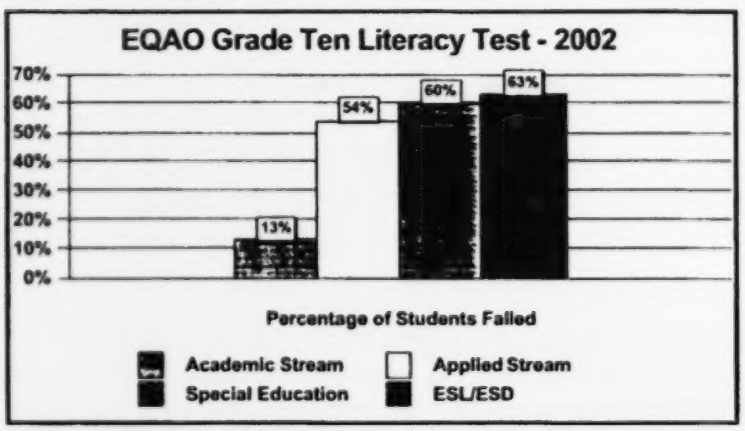
EQAO Ontario Provincial Reports on Achievement

Grade 10

Literacy Test

Under secondary school reform, all students must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in order to receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. In 2001, 63% of ESL students failed the test, compared to a 25% failure rate for all students writing the test.[8]

ESL students may temporarily defer writing the Literacy test or, when they write it, they may be given more time and/or a smaller group setting in which to write.[9] However, even with these special provisions, 57% of ESL students failed part or all of the test. For many English as a Second Language students, this requirement makes the acquisition of a diploma impossible.



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Recommendations

People for Education recommends that:

- the provincial government change the criteria which qualifies a student for English as a Second Language funding to recognize that
  - some children, born in Canada, arrive at school unable to speak English,
  - some children take longer than three years to acquire the language, and
  - some children, who enter Canada from English-speaking countries, do not speak English;

- the funding formula be modified to provide resources for boards to accommodate students arriving in Canada throughout the school year;

- classes in Kindergarten to Grade 3 have no more than 20 students, classes in Grades 4 to 6 have no more than 24 students, and in Grades 7 to 12 no more than 30 students;

- the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test be significantly modified to address the language challenges of ESL students, so that these students are not unfairly handicapped in their acquisition of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Notes

[1] http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/010925/d010925a.htm
The Daily, Tuesday, September 25, 2001.

[2] http://www.statcan.ca/english/Estat/communiques/20011030.htm
Population by Mother Tongue, 1996 Census.

[3] *E.R.G.O. Report to the Ministry of Education*, English Second Language and English Literacy Development Resource Group of Ontario, June 17, 2002, p. 9.

[4] Cummins, J. "Age on Arrival and Immigrant Second Language Learning in Canada: A Reassessment." *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 2, pp. 132-49.

[5] *The Ontario Curriculum. Grades 1-8: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development – A Resource Guide*, 2001. Toronto: The Queen's Printer, p. 6.

[6] Ibid., p.11.

[7] *Fulfilling the Promise*, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2002, p.2.

[8] http://www.eqao.com/eqao/home_page/pdf_e/02/02P026e.pdf
OntarioSecondary School Literacy Test: Report of Provincial Results. September, 2002, pp. 9-11.

[9] http://www.eqao.com/eqao/home_page/pdf_e/02/02P021e.pdf
Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions

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